

Sketch

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Discovery

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Abstract

Jimmy followed cautiously as Buddy scrambled over the stacks of old magazines inside the stairway door, and then climbed the steep, narrow stairs...

His eyes were bright with tears as he looked up and down the deserted street once more.

"Darn ol' cat."

The screen door creaked open and a voice called out. The shoulders beneath the candy-striped shirt were slumped as he walked to the house.

Behind the tall window the old man sank back into his chair. His cheeks were wet.

Discovery

by John Gordon

JIMMY followed cautiously as Buddy scrambled over the stacks of old magazines inside the stairway door, and then climbed the steep, narrow stairs.

"Wait for me."

He knew Buddy wouldn't wait; Buddy never did. Ever since Jimmy could remember, no matter where they went, Buddy always got there first. "He's older though," Jimmy explained to himself. "After all, he'll be nine this winter."

The stairway was dim and quiet. Completely cut off from the gleaming world of kitchen smells and busy grown-ups, it seemed strange and inviting. But Jimmy suddenly felt a little sad. He didn't know why. He traced an aimless pattern in the dust on the magazines.

"Hey! C'mon! Look what I found!" Buddy's shrill voice shattered the attic quiet.

Jimmy hurried up the stairs into the pale sunlight that filtered through the window, caked with dirt, at the far end of the narrow room. Buddy was vigorously cranking an old Victrola that squatted under the sloping rafters.

"It's got records and everything. It runs just like the one we got at home, only you got to crank it," Buddy explained seriously.

He placed a record on the turntable and lowered the needle. The scratchy voice of Sir Harry Lauder filled the attic. Buddy laughed at the strange sound.

"Boy, this thing's no good."

"I wonder whose it was?" Jimmy said, pulling a flake of peeling varnish off its lid.

Buddy shrugged. "I dunno. It's no good. Look! Skates." He took them down from the nail and examined them happily.

Jimmy looked around the room. Cardboard boxes, a trunk, a pile of books — an endless amount of not-quite-familiar things. He walked slowly to the pile of books and lifted the largest one. It was heavy, and it didn't have any printing on the front. He ran his fingers over the intricate, raised pattern on the dark leather cover.

Buddy's voice broke into his daydream. "Now I can skate this winter. I bet I can skate faster'n you."

"They're too big," Jimmy answered absent-mindedly.

Buddy scowled. "Well, I'm going to be big. Bigger'n you."

Jimmy ignored the taunt and opened the book. It was filled with yellowing photographs of people frozen in stiff poses and dressed in strange clothes. A hand-printed caption caught his eye. "Mr. and Mrs. Adolf Gegner. Married March 3, 1901." Why, that meant that the tall, square-shouldered young man in the picture was Grandpa. And the woman beside him was Grandma! "But — she looks younger than Mother," he said aloud.

"What?"

Jimmy didn't hear the question. His mind reeled with the realization that his grandparents had once been young. He sat abruptly on the edge of the box and stared at the picture.

"Well, you can look at those old books if you want to. I'm going to ask Grandpa if I can have the skates."

Buddy hesitated briefly, then clattered down the stairs.

Jimmy tried to picture Grandpa, with his cane and gray hair, as a boy his own age. And Grandma, who had died last year, as a girl Cousin Linda's age.

"If they were my age," he reasoned, "then some day I'll be as old as they are. Not just as old as Mommy and Daddy, but *that* old. But Grandma died last year . . ."

Jimmy hurriedly closed the album and ran to the stairway, suddenly afraid to look back.